Making and Remaking the Transnational: Of Boundaries, Social Spaces and Social Mechanisms

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Abstract

There is now a third generation of transnational scholarship, which goes beyond the analysis of cross-border ties and looks at the genesis, reproduction and change of boundaries in social spaces, both within and across nation-state borders. This analysis proceeds in five steps. The first describes three generations and directions of transnational scholarship. The second part introduces the more specific concepts of transnationalization and transnationality. At the centre of the third part is a comparison of transnational and global and world approaches. A transnational lens looks at how boundaries in cross-border settings evolve and change. The fourth part focuses on the concepts of boundary and social space. The perspective is process-oriented and shows how borders and boundaries are redrawn in a period of intense restructuration of capital, changing geopolitical constellations and new constellations of cultural diversity. In order to move towards causal analysis of boundary change, the fifth part uses a case study to consider the social mechanisms operative in the (un)making of boundaries along diverse characteristics, such as religion, class, ethnicity, and gender. The question for future research is to integrate various (spatial) scales of analysis to arrive at a better understanding of changing forms of social inequality across borders.

Keywords: cross-border, transnationality, societal systems, boundaries, social space

1. Three Generations of Transnational Scholarship

We can delineate three generations of transnational scholarship. The first generation, flourishing in the late 1960s and 1970s, asked about the emergence, role and impact of large-scale, cross-border organizations. This literature, steeped in the field of International Relations, focused its attention on the interdependence between states, resulting from the existence and operations of powerful non-state actors, such as multinational companies (Keohane and Nye 1977). Curiously, the interest in this transnational approach quickly disappeared with the onset of debates on globalization from the late 1970s onwards. Perhaps this demise was related to the fact that globalization studies recentered the interest to how national political economies were reshaped by ever growing capital flows across borders. Much more than later generations of the trans-national literature, globalization studies emphasized top-down model of societal transformation.

The second generation of transnational scholarship originally evolved in a very specific field – international or cross-border migration – and with a decided focus on the agency of a particular type of agent, migrants. It was in anthropology and later sociology that this lens took hold. This gaze dealt with dense and continuous ties across the borders of nation-states, which concatenate into social formations called interchangeably transnational social spaces or transnational social fields. Definitions were quite similar, and they all contained some of the following: "By transnational spaces we mean relatively stable, lasting and dense sets of ties reaching beyond and across the borders of sovereign states. They consist of combinations of ties and their contents, positions in networks and organizations, and networks or organizations that cut across the borders of at least two nation-states. Transnational spaces differ from clearly demarcated state territories." (Faist 2004; Basch et al. 1994; Kivisto 2001)

The two topical areas which have received by far the most attention in this literature have been migrant integration (assimilation) and political practices across borders (diasporas). First, it is noteworthy that the pioneers of this understanding of the transnational challenged the notion that the incorporation of immigrants takes place in the container of the respective nation-state in which immigrants settle for longer periods of time in their life course. What they proposed, instead, was new modes of incorporation, which existed side by side, such as assimilation, partial adaption, or integration in transnational groups (Glick Schiller et al. 2005). While it is true that the claim that transnational integration would supplant assimilation and other forms of incorporation proved overblown and could not be substantiated empirically, there is reason to argue that the nation-state is not the only social formation relevant

for social integration of migrants. The question always is: incorporation into what? Other studies on migrant incorporation looked at nation-states and emphasized the co-existence of modes such as assimilation, multiculturalism and transnational spaces (Faist 2003; Faist 2009a). The second focus on diaspora or transnational community, already prominent in the early literature of social anthropologists, has dealt with the formation of transnational groups or "communities without propinquity", inquiring into the manifold cross-border social practices of migrants, those left behind and relatively immobile agents[1]. It also documented and discussed the efforts of governments to create extra-territorial nations in a capitalist world system, and the efforts of diasporas to engage in "homeland" politics (Gamlen 2006).

One of the enduring problems of this type of literature was not that it still considered nation-states as relevant actors, they are indeed. It is rather that much of the literature reified and essentialized important categories of nation-state thinking, such as nations and ethnicity. Even nowadays, transnational studies abound which look at particular national groups around the world and their relations to home countries instead of enquiring into how such groups may be sustained and come about in the first place.

Before moving to the third generation of transnational scholarship, which has slowly evolved out of this criticism, it is necessary to point to a second transnational strand; mostly not connected to the first just dis-cussed. It is the concern with non-state actors in the form of civil society beyond the borders, expressed in studies of social movements and "advocacy networks" (Keck and Sikkink 1998)). This literature mainly does not address competitors to the state, such as multinational companies, or flows across the borders of states, such as transnational migration, but emphasizes issues prevalent in the public spheres and involving mobilization of target groups around various issues, such as the environment, production chains, human rights, gender, religion or crime. An incomplete list would figure, for example, transnational terrorist and criminal networks, transnational organized crime (Shelley 1995) and wars (Kaldor 1999), transnational religions and communities (Hoeber Rudolpf 1997), transnational financial flows (Held 1999), transnational viz. global commodity chains (Gereffi 1994; Boli and Thomas 1997) and transnational social movements (Kriesberg 1997), transnational networks and counter-hegemonic globalization (Evans 2000), transnational feminist praxis (Naples 2002), transgovernmental relations17 (Slaughter 1997), and transnational (cultural) diffusion (Kaufman and Patterson 2005).

[1] See compilatons, e.g., Thomas Faist, Ethnic and Racial Studies 1999.

The most current – third – generation of transnational scholarship took off with the criticism of "methodological nationalism" (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003). Nonetheless, methodological nationalism needs to be unbundled in order to be used conceptually into methodological territorialism and methodological essentialism.

First, on a methodological level, transnational approaches, along with global approaches such as world society and world polity theories, aim to overcome "methodological territorialism" (Scholte 2000: 56), that is, conflating society, state and territory. Such methodological territorialism is evident in many analyses which prioritise state agency in the traditional Weberian trilogy of the congruence of territory, authority and people. Many studies in migrant political participation take the container space of the nation-state as the singular frame of reference. One particularly pertinent example is that empirical data is largely collected and analysed on a nation-state basis and compared internationally. Nation-state comparative work abounds in fields such as migration and immigration studies. If cross-border interactions are more important than this work leads us to believe, we need to open up the container box and allow conceptually for criss-crossing social spaces.

Second, transnational approaches also strive to overcome "methodo-logical essentialism", that is the conflation of society, state and nation. Mi-grant formations, such as networks or organizations, can be built around various categorical distinctions, such as ethnicity, race, gender, schooling, professional training, political affiliation, and sexual preference. However, it is far from clear that specific categories such as migrants always congeal around community-centered entities, such as "ethnic communities", or that such communities would be the most important element to understand social life. Ethnicity constitutes a particularly vexing issue in transnational studies. On the one hand a transnational approach should be able to overcome the "ethnic" bias inherent in much migration scholarship. The fallacy is to label migrants immediately by "ethnic" or "national" categories. Often scholars presuppose prematurely that categories such as Turks, Brazilians and so forth matter a lot for all realms and purposes, since they often do in public discourse. On the other hand, our methods should enable us to trace actually existing social formations, such as networks of reciprocity built around ethnic markers, which are of great importance, for example, in informal transfer systems of financial remittances. This means to turn the issue of the importance of ethnicity into an empirical question; an approach followed in using the concepts of boundary, space and social mechanisms below. Yet we need to go even further and question the heavy-handed focus of migrant and migration studies on community. While the distinction between "Gemeinschaft" (community) and "Gesellschaft" (society), based on Ferdinand Tönnies, may serve a useful heuristic purpose in distinguishing ideal types of tradition and modernity, it is

misleading if applied in real-type constellations of sociality. A precocious focus on community carries the danger of reifying essential(ist) identities of the subject under study. A more open approach emphasizing sociality – social forms of interaction – is called for to avoid premature conclusions. This concern with sociality in general also allows us to connect group- and network-specific processes to the public realm – and thus also to the realm of civil society. At once, such an optic raises questions about the formation of groups, the constitution of boundaries between groups, and the change of group boundaries.

Thus, the third generation of scholarship is concerned less with ac-counting for cross-border ties and flows of fixed categories of persons or groups, but focuses more on changing boundaries. This is so because social spaces denote dynamic processes, not static notions of ties and positions. The main point is that the new approach is not only concerned with sustained and continuous across-border phenomena but with boundaries demarcating social spaces in a wider sense – in particular, on how the boundaries themselves come into existence and change. Boundaries may refer to distinctions along categories such as groups, organizations and cultural differences. In general, if it makes sense, as the critique of methodological nationalism charges, that nation-states – and, by implication, ethnic or national groups – are not quasi-natural entities, it is of prime importance to get a distance to fixed notions of social formations and their boundaries (Khagram and Levitt 2008). It is then indeed more useful to start with less obtrusive concepts such as sociality, that is, social boundaries and spaces. This way offers a chance to look at changing boundaries – in relation to existing ones (e.g. nation-states) and to new ones (emergent properties of transnational and global systems), and explore how old spaces are trans-formed and new spaces emerge. It is not an approach which starts with a clean slate concerning borders. Yet it is cognizant that borders and, more broadly, boundaries, are ever shifting and changing. In particular, a transnational approach looks at the changes relating to existing boundaries and the formation of new ones. Of great interest is the interaction of emergent transnational social formations and spaces with existing spaces such as the nation-state or international and even world systems. All of this implies that the existence of boundaries is not to be taken for granted but should be an object of inquiry.

In sum, while the first generation transnational relations literature in International Relations still took the container as a point of departure and was concerned with perforations at borders and interdependencies of non-state actors across the containers, the second generation literature since the 1980s and 1990s imagined, however crudely, new concepts of the container. Examples in the transnational migration literature are, for example, extra-territorial efforts of nation-states and the inclusion of those “abroad”, and above all, social formations,

such as diasporas, which are "in between" and across. This literature easily connects with new trends in cultural studies, which celebrated diasporic consciousness, hybridity and in-betweenness (Bhabha 1994). Somewhat apart is the literature on transnational networks and social movements, which is more of a continuation of the older transnational rela-tions literature, although there is more concern with concepts such as de-mocracy, norms and civil society. The third generation of scholarship now questions fundamental methodological assumptions and thus emphasizes the transnational (and translocal, transregional) character of social bounda-ries and social spaces.[2]

2. From Transnationalism to Transnationalization and Transnationality

If a transnational gaze pries open container boxes, there must be an objection to the term transnational*ism*, referring to 'ism' as indicating an ideology. The term "transnationalism" often gets into trouble by promoting transnationalism as a fixed description of an idealized past, present or future. Because such idealizations tend not only to produce gaps in logic, but also to unnecessarily stoke anti-transnational anxiety among researchers (e.g. Koopmans and Statham 2000 who conflate transnationalism with post-nationalism) and in public debates (those who associate transnationalism with terrorism), it is important to adopt a more dynamic approach. It is useful to take the 'ism' out of transnationalism – for a transnational

[2] How useful this perspective is becomes clear when we apply it to the concept and the formation of the nation-state itself. After all, a transnational perspective not only helps to look at emergent cross-border social formations, their properties and their entanglements with nation-states and institutions of the nation-state system but also help us to better understand the formation of nation-states and the nation-state system itself. Clearly, the term transnational refers to "national" and thus to the age of the nation-state, which has lasted for around 200 years. We usually say "nation" but mean "state" and thus transnational may refer to both nation and state, and the transcendent aspects. In a historical perspective, the reference to the national and the state raises the obvious question: What came before the nation-state? In a nut-shell, the argument is that nation-states are themselves products of transnational relations. Before the current prevalence of the nation-state model around the world after World War Two, and before the high noon of establishing nation-states in Europe since the 19th century, we observe smaller units than the nation-state, such as village and clan, yet also bigger units, such as empires. Among the latter, the Ottoman Empire has been especially important as an external and quasi-transnational influence on the formation of the European state system. Other candidates for forerunners of the national include world religions, especially those with a missionary zeal, such as Christianity and Islam. The history of the nation-state is usually dated back to the emergence of the international nation-state system and its birth in Europe with the Treaty of Westphalia (1648). It stands to reason that this treaty could not have served as a foundation for a European nation-state centred international system if there had not been – 40 years later – the military victory of Vienna (1688) against the Ottoman Empire. In other words, the nation-state as form crowded out its historical competitors, such as empires (cf. Charles Tilly, Coercion, Capital and European States AD 990-1990 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990)), and could only do so by its transnational constitution. Perhaps the nation-state system may be seen as an historical interruption, with the grid of a nation-state system superimposed upon an overlapping patch-work of multiple places and jurisdictions – consisting of tribal, feudal, folk, religious, civilizational social spaces. Overall, the transnational gaze presupposes nations just like post-modernism implies modernity. The nation-state signals a concept of a socio-political and economic formation which is bounded by collective affiliation. How national homogeneity is conceived and how it is bounded, and what social spaces intersect in nation-states, however, depends on contingent factors. What has been visible over the past decades is that most nation-states are in fact multi-national states in the strict sense of the word that is, containing several groups which claim to be nations. Some nation-states have even declared that they are multi-national, take Canada and Australia as examples.

social theory which treats transnationalism as a research agenda for the social sciences rather than as a fixed idea or a desirable state of affairs.[3]

In order to situate the transnational approach in the panoply of post-national concepts, one would need to go beyond transnationalism – it is not clear if it is the ideology of the researcher or that of the researched – and turn to processual and conditional definitions: Transnationalization con-notes boundary change as connected to cross-border *processes* and trans-nationality refers to an accompanying *condition*. Viewed this way, transnational*ism* is useful as the description of a discourse connected to transnationalization and transnationality, akin to globalism with respect to globalization and globality.

3. Transnational, Global and World Approaches

The new river of the transnational has been characterized by many tributary streams and meandered into many rivulets since the early 1990s. A very encompassing definition of these efforts includes transnationalisation "as a mode of cultural reproduction, an avenue of capital, a site of political engagement and a reconstruction of place or locality" (Vertovec 1999). This definition has the benefit of being multidimensional in taking up economic, political and cultural aspects of social order and intersects with spatiality, yet it is not clear how it would differ from variants of globalization studies.

It is useful not only to distinguish between transnational and global approaches, but bring in world theories. Global approaches are a rather amorphous lot, which range from a concern with how nation-states are affected by ever denser cross-border flows of resources to truly world approaches. It is world approaches that are theoretically more consistent, and which are of interest here.

[3] In addition, the adjective transnational suggests a conflation of nation and state and thus is itself methodologically nationalist. Yet the political unit that is transcended by institutions, actions, discourses or flows is not the nation, but the state. It is certainly very common to regard nation and state as synonyms. If we wanted to avoid this implication, we could use the term 'trans-state' rather than 'trans-national' (Thomas Faist, Transstaatliche Räume. Politik, Wirtschaft und Kultur in und zwischen Deutschland und der Türkei, Bielefeld: transcript). This would, however, create some additional confusion in India or the U.S. where the constituent units of the federation are called 'states' and the encompassing one is referred to as a country or nation.

When comparing transnational and world approaches, "transnation-al" is an older term, predating globalization by some ten to fifteen years; around 1970 as compared to the early to mid-1980s. Of course, as usual, you can go back even further: The Oxford Dictionary of English dates the emergence of the term transnational to ca. 1920, documented with a quotation from an economic text that saw Europe after World War One characterized by its "international or more correctly transnational economy" (Soanes 2003). That being said, globalization in contrast to transnationalization is more encompassing in terms of world spanning processes; transnational is less and thus more limited in scope. This consideration would also apply to normative terms such as cosmopolitanism (Faist 2009b).

Methodologically, most world approaches are concerned, in the first instance, with macro-dynamics and then go "down" to micro-dynamics. Ana-lyses of 'lower' levels, such as the household, are then often seen as an exemplification of higher-order dynamics of the world system. By contrast, accounts of the transnational tend to be more agency-oriented. This is very visible in world systems theory, which is, in essence, a top-down, outside-in approach (Wallerstein 1983), even though a micro-sociology may be attached to it. In contrast, transnational approaches usually start from (small) groups and net-works of mobiles, embedded in more encompassing macro-structures. In its broader meaning, "transnational studies" (Khagram and Levitt 2008) thus tend to be concerned with topics such as migrant networks, traders and ethnic business constellations, politics of place among migrants and returnees, diasporas and development (Faist 2008), immigrant incorporation – but also social movements and advocacy networks and the non-exhaustive list of "trans"-phenomena mentioned above.

If pressed hard for a short and concise difference between transnational and world approaches, one could argue that transnational*ity* refers to a condition and above all consciousness that falls short of globality; transnational*ization* as a process is also short of globalization in terms of its spatial scope. Interestingly, transnational*ism* as a discourse could be regarded as a stepping stone towards globalism and even cosmopolitanism – but also the contrary, reinforcing nationalism. After all, transnationalism refers to the Janus face of cross-border processes and conditions which may foster long-distance nationalism. Nationalist claims are frequently articulated and mobilized within cross-border groups and structures. Nationalism is not always geared towards achieving congruence between national-cultural boundaries and state borders. Nation-building may be confined to sub-state territories without ever crossing the threshold to secession, and it may extend beyond state borders by attempting to bind together populations in a homeland territory and abroad without trying to remove the borders between them or to bring back external kin-populations into the home-

land. An example of the former has been, until now, Québec in Canada; an example for the latter has been the Irish diaspora in the USA since the 19th century. In sum, trans-national approaches are able to deal with the dual face of cross-border transactions – they may reinforce or even contribute to the making of nation-states via nationalist diasporas, or they may transcend national containers by opening up opportunities for agents through multi-sitedness beyond national(ist) categories. Just think of the difference between the Irish, Jewish and Polish diasporas in 19th and 20th century North America and Europe, which stand in contrast to issue networks of social movement activists along the lines of gender, ecology or human.

The transnational approach carries the potential to escape the teleological thinking of much of global and world society research, which simply assumes a higher level of analysis than the nation-state and containerizes the social not at the national but at the global level. To simply postulate that we need to replace the nation-state by the world system or world society (Meyer et al. 1997) a point of departure and thus move from methodological nationalism to a higher level of abstraction, is misleading. Even approaches, such as "methodological cosmopolitanism" (Beck and Snaider 2006) tend to ignore the main insight of transnational approaches, which, on the one hand, try to eschew dichotomies such as nation and world and operating on multiple scales (local, regional, national and so forth), and on the other hand, recognize the structuring role of the nation-state as the "master of space" (Lefebvre 1991), or at least one of these masters. Conceptually, the term transnational occupies an in-between-position be-tween the national and the global viz. world.

These conceptual clarifications lead toward answering the question: why "transnationalism" now? After all, the focus in the second and third generations of transnational literature is on agency vis-à-vis global structures – be it in the form of migrant networks providing social security across borders, or networks of social movement activists. The aim is towards an understanding of contestations in a world characterized both by increasing integration via economic ties and fledgling international regimes and, equally important, by increasing social inequalities, and perceptions of social and cultural heterogeneities. Looking at cross-border transactions is intimately connected to changing boundaries along economic, political and cultural lines. Yet boundary changes are essentially a question of power constellations. The early transnational migration literature portrayed the power aspect in a dichotomous way in distinguishing *transnationalism from above vs. transnationalism from below* (Portes et al. 1999). Transnationalism from above referred to the practices of multinational corporations, or international institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund's structural adjustment programs in the 1990s. By contrast, transnationalism from below was supposedly found in grassroots transnational enterprise, social movements, and migrant net-works – and chal-

lenged the institutionalized power structures[4]. In early formulations one almost gets the impression that transnational migrants are a cross-border substitute for the lost working class as a historical subject of social transformation. Such a conceptualization of above vs. below is misleading, however. As we know, practices "from below" may also reproduce authoritarian structures or exclusion along gender, class, religious, ethnic or racial lines (Goldring and Krishnamurti 2008). In short, the above and below are found in all social formations, however small and grassroots they may (appear to) be. If this is plausible, then we need to turn to a more nuanced discussion of borders and boundaries within social spaces going beyond and intersecting places such as nation-states. It is important to unpack the notion of power and identify the social mechanisms which are at work in the making and unmaking of boundaries in social spaces.

4. Of Redrawn Boundaries in (Transnational) Social Spaces

Since the transnational perspective, unlike the global and world perspectives, do not simply replace one container by another, that is the nation-state by the world, it is the question of borders and boundaries that come to the fore. Thus, while all the approaches mentioned, transnational and global alike, speak about borders, there are significant differences. Global approaches, in particular, sometimes verge towards a borderless world in which social structures evaporate into a "space of flows" (Castells 1996). At the centre are mostly the consequences of border changes, not the changes themselves. A transnational perspective, by contrast, raises the question of how borders are changing – with borders disappearing being a specific case of boundaries changing. A few examples may illustrate this point. The avatar of the transnational, and the first generation scholarship in particular, has been the transnational company. As the literature abundantly pointed out, transnational companies, in contrast to multinational companies, have de-centralized headquarters, thus constituting a genuine transnational organization spanning across national borders. In the second and third generation literatures since the 1990s, cultural studies has rediscovered diaspora not only in the classical sense of a group having experienced traumatic dispersal, longing to return to a (mythical) homeland and living an existence separate from the host society. Instead, diaspo-

[4] Cf. André C Drainville, 'The Fetishism of Global Civil Society: Global Governance, Transnation-al Urbanism and Sustainable Capitalism in the World Economy', in Michael Peter Smith and Luis Eduardo Guarnizo (eds.), Transnationalism from Below (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1998), pp. 35-63 for a critique.

ra now also refers to a more general consciousness (Appadurai 1996). In this view, to paraphrase Nathan Glazer, "we are all diasporists now". Sociology has dealt with migration, and among other things, with migrant networks spanning borders. Yet whether such migrant networks make border enforcement a futile exercise, as claimed by some (Phillips and Massey 1999) is highly questionable, given the high capacities of European states to fence their borders (Ette and Faist 2007). What has certainly changed are the mechanisms by which border control is enforced, for example, safe third country rules or the externalization of control by detention camps in North Africa for migrants and asylum seekers on their way to Europe. Moreover, Political Science, International Relations in particular, has turned to the study of deterritorialization, asking, for example, how the study of supraterritorial-functional units such as the EU could still be described as "grounding your feet in territoriality" (Ruggie 1993). As these few examples from diverse disciplines suggest, we do not live in a borderless world but in a world, in which borders are constantly being re-drawn.

This state of affairs raises the question of how to reconcile talk of borderless-ness with the continuing salience of borders. The argument put forward is that borders do not simply disappear but are redrawn. In order to fruitfully apply this insight to empirical analysis, we need to make two extensions. First, borders are a special instance of boundaries. Borders are – among others – set by nation-states, often legitimated by the interstate system and enforced by nation-states or supra-national organizations such as the EU. Their regulation is not only external, at the margin of the state's territory but also internal; as evidenced by controls of non-citizens or work-site inspections targeted at irregular migrants and corresponding employers in the interior of states. Also, we are not only dealing with state monopoly of enforcing borders. Each border control, whether internal or external, involves an ascription as a citizen, traveller, a member of a religious group and so forth. Hence border controls refer to boundaries between categories of persons. Seen in this way, transnational may be seen as an overarching term, which not only relates to state borders but also to changing boundaries in processes associated with the unbundling of states, that is, transnational. This point will become clearer once we introduce the idea of how borders and boundaries function as central elements of place- and space-making. Second, the creation, maintenance and enforcement of borders are functions of power, be it authoritative (non-)decision-making or the "symbolic power" (Bourdieu 1989) of generating frames through which persons, groups and events are slotted. Just take geographical mobility across borders and boundaries. States make rules of admission and membership; they exercise the power of ascription in that they and other agents are involved in definitions of "us" and "them", or desirable and undesirable migrants.

It is useful to analyse actual borders and boundaries as the institutionalization of the relations and differentials of power in the political, socio-economic and cultural realms. There are various types of how boundaries are being redrawn: (1) existing boundaries become porous; (2) boundaries shift; (3) boundaries are maintained or even reinforced; and (4) new boundaries emerge[5]. Further below we look at the fourth case empirically, the emergence of new boundaries.

Boundaries concatenate into social spaces. It is necessary to disentangle the implications of transnational ties. One way of doing this is to take a closer look at the interweaving of place(s) and space(s) across the borders of nation-states. In a nutshell, the argument is that we need to look both at social spaces spanning various places, whereby the spaces may be located across different states (*space*-ization), and at places intersected by various cross-border social spaces (*place*-ization). Whereas the former dimension looks at genuinely cross-border processes and conditions, the latter is more concerned with the consequences of broader developments for places. The first dimension relates to transnational social spaces constituted by (the interaction of) social formations such as transnational families, diasporas, religious communities, social movements, businesses, and states which criss-cross state borders. The second dimension is equally relevant in that it addresses the repercussions of transnationalization as processes to transnationality as a condition in places. Space thus refers to social and symbolic ties or transactions of agents across places and the potential concatenation into social structures, that is, social formations (e.g. families, networks) and their interaction with other agents, such as states. Place here connotes the territorial aspect which is imputed with meanings and cognitions by the respective agents[6].

The past few decades have seen a renewed interest in space as a concept for social theory. This "spatial turn" has occurred at a time when ever denser flows of goods, capital, information, services and people around the globe have led to what Karl Marx called the "annihilation of space by time" or, to put it more carefully in David Harvey's words, "time-space compression". The idea of space dissolving into social relations is in line with the dominant strand of social science thinking throughout much of the 20th century, which has seen the process of differentiation of modern society being inextricably linked to emancipation from

[5] Inspired by the typologies presented, e.g., in Aristide R. Zolberg, Long Litt Woon, 'Why Islam is Like Spanish: Cultural Incorporation in Europe and the United States', Politics & Society (Vol. 27, No. 1, 1999), pp. 1-27.

[6] See Thomas Faist, 'Social Space', in George Ritzer (ed.), Encyclopedia of Social Theory, Vol. 2, (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 2004), pp. 760-763 for a conceptual discussion.

spatial factors. In a nutshell, theorists such as Georg Simmel and Émile Durkheim assumed that space would gradually lose in significance as abstract forms of social organization (*Vergesellschaftung*), such as monetarized exchange, become more pervasive. Yet, the re-surgence of theorizing on space raises the question whether modernity, late modernity or post-modernity is indeed characterized by a decoupling of space and time. It could be hy-pothesized that even time-space compression may not lead to a disappearance of space but to a regrouping of space-time orders. After all, space – very much like the much more theo-rized concept of time – is a crucial element of *Vergesellschaftung*.

The spatial turn in the cultural and social sciences attests to the con-tinuing relevance of social space and to the changing relationship of bounda-ries in social space. As long as people act in place and space, borders and boundaries matter. For example, in processes of geographical mobility of persons, most notably in migration, the newcomers first have to cross nation-state borders. Also, those who are newly incorporated have to (re)negotiate their relative status and thus the boundaries between "us" and "them" through reworking codes of cultural difference. Under conditions of transnationalization and transnationality, diversity – or more carefully, heterogeneity among persons and collectives – assumes a heightened relevance. Social formations across the world are brought closer together and, at the same time, kept apart in new ways, that is, boundaries keep disappearing and new boundaries emerging. On the one hand, we might observe a lessening of diversity across places and on the other hand increasing variety *within* places. This is why both aspects of transnationalization, cross-border transactions on the one hand, and the implications of transnationalization on the other hand, are intricately related – in other words, external and internal transnationalization are simply two sides of the same coin.

When conceptualizing boundaries in social space, we need to en-gage in an archae-ology of conceptual distinctions in order to arrive at a notion which considers transnational ties, encompassing both global and local conditions. This exercise necessitates a short dis-cussion of relative concepts of social space, that is, the assumption that social space is so-cially constituted and a social product. First, the notion of "time-space distanciation" (Giddens 1984) conceives space as the duality of presence and absence. It addresses the following question: How do processes of social integration – such as trust, intimacy and family – change, when distant and 'absent' structures influence 'present' in everyday places? The question remaining in this account is: What are the social mechanisms mediating between the present and the absent? Second, not an answer but a first approach is the conception of social space as a field of power and resistance (Lefebvre 1974). It highlights how presence and absence have mixed in new and volatile ways in processes through domination and

counter-movements. The master-mechanisms are commodification and bureaucratization of and through space. The outcomes of master processes are contested terrain. Again, we are confronted with the question of social mechanisms, this time on a macro-scale. Third, in order to bring in place within space, it is useful to turn again to "space as flows" (Castells 1996). In an extreme form, place simply disappears, resulting in "non-places" (Marc Augé), such as airport lounges and supermarkets in which social relations are almost non-existent. This limiting case suggests that there is a potential for creating social ties. "Space as flows" can also be described as spaces intersecting places, such as the in the "global cities" approach (Sassen 1991). Space may then be seen as a "power-geometry" (Doreen Massey), which is not only driven by structural forces of commodification and bureaucratization but also by agency. Fourth, one may usefully connect these approaches in an under-standing of *space as glocalization*. One important form of social space in the context of cross-border concatenation of social ties is transnational social spaces. Such a view treats space as concomitant processes of generalization and specification, of globalization and localization. The production of space can be considered a dialectical process. On the one hand, globalization allows a de-placing from concrete territorial places (*space of flows*). On the other hand, global flows have to be anchored locally in specific places (space of places). Space is conceived as a relational process of structuring relative positions of social and symbolic ties between social actors, social resources and goods inherent in social ties, and the connection of these ties to places. These connections can be both materially and discursively.

The search for mechanisms indicating change of boundaries leads to a distinction of two crucial fields, namely, first, accounting for the integration of social spaces and, second, accounting for changing boundaries in social spaces. The first realm has received some attention. Transnational ties can concatenate in various forms of transnational social spaces, namely transnational reciprocity in kinship groups, transnational circuits in exchange-based networks, and transnational communities such as diasporas, characterized by high degrees of diffuse solidarity (Faist 2000, Chapter 7). Thus, mechanisms such as various forms of exchange, reciprocity and solidarity are operative in ensuring the integration of cross-border social formations (not coterminous with incorporation in immigration settings but certainly part of it). What has received much less attention is the transformation of boundaries in intersecting social spaces. We now move to an analysis of how boundaries in such spaces change, are redrawn, reinforced or transformed.

5. Of Social Mechanisms Accounting for the Drawing of Boundaries in Transnational Social Spaces

So far, the analysis of the transnational gaze has presented a process-oriented perspective, which seeks to describe cross-border relations and the implications of such relations for the making und unmaking of boundaries in social spaces. The resulting perspective is not only concerned with border-crossing social spaces as such but also with the consequences of cross-border ties and structures for local and national assemblages. Thus, transnational structures concatenate into social spaces; and these social spaces are always also place-bound. These spaces are neither simply constituted by territory nor are these structures constituted purely by social relations. Instead, the boundaries of social spaces are socially constituted, taking into account both flows and places[7]. To move towards an explanatory mode, a crucial element is to account for shifting, permeable, new, and rein-forced boundaries and thus also the transformation of (transnational) social spaces. Towards this end we may use the mid-range concept of social mechanisms. A social mechanismic kind of explanation aims towards causal reconstruction of processes leading to defined outcomes. The term (social) mechanism refers to recurrent processes or pathways, linking specified initial conditions (not necessarily causes in the strict sense) and specific outcomes, the latter of which can be effects produced or purposes achieved. Social mechanisms can be therefore defined as "a delimited class of events that alter relations among specified sets of elements in identical or closely similar ways over a variety of situations." (McAdam et al. 2001: 24) Formally, one can thus define social mechanism (M) as links between initial conditions (input I) and effect (outcome O), formally expressed: I-M-O. M explicates an observed relationship between specific initial conditions and a specific outcome. Mechanisms are not correlations and thus can usually not be observed as such. Mechanisms are largely imperceptible, they must be conjectured (Bunge 2004).

Mechanismic explanations thus do not look for statistical relation-ships among variables but seek to explain a given social phenomenon – an event, structure, or development – by identifying the processes through which it is generated. It is geared towards looking at causality in path-ways (Mayntz 2004). Mechanismic statements – not to be confused with

[7] Space is a term broader than system. How we could include an analysis of transnational systems is a question beyond the scope of this analysis. Clearly, some global approaches are systems theories, such as world systems theory, world society and, implicitly, world polity theory. The approach offered here is more relational, situated in between agency and struc-tures. A relational perspective (see also Tilly 2008) could nonetheless be seen as systemic, that is, cognizant of the insight that structures are parts of larger wholes called systems.

mechanic statements, since most social mechanisms are not mechanic, as in machines – are causal generalizations about recurrent processes. There is no claim that such mechanisms are akin to covering-laws. Social mechanismic explanations would claim that certain outcomes occur sometimes. Mechanisms as causal elements can be used in various theories, links in theories or parts of theories. Yet most important, in Merton's language, social mechanisms are building blocks of middle-range theories. In sum, mechanisms are explanatory devices. There are probably no universal mechanisms, hence no panaceas; all mechanisms are domain-specific, issue-dependent and system-specific (Bunge 2004).

The following exemplary empirical sketch of how to apply a social mechanismic approach in transnational studies uses two dimensions (Figure 1). The first dimension refers to *types of social mechanisms*, such as social closure: inclusion and exclusion; opportunity hoarding; exploitation; hierarchization; brokerage. The second dimension regards *scales*. Out of various possibilities for scales – cognitive mechanisms[8], relational mechanisms[9], systemic mechanisms (Mayntz 2004) and environmental mechanisms, the short sketch distinguishes between relational and institutional mechanisms: Relational mechanisms alter the "connections among people, groups, and interpersonal networks" (McAdam et al. 2001: 58). They emphasize relations, that is, structures, and not only individual action. For example, the mechanism of brokerage is not defined as a specific type of action (brokering) but as the process of linking "two or more unconnected social sites by a unit that mediates their relation with one another and/or yet other sites." (ibid.: 26) Here, the relational realm refers to persons, small groups and associations. The institutional realm concerns the impact of structures and their emergent properties for social protection.

In order to exemplify the usefulness of a social mechanismic analysis to understand the processes involving changing boundaries from a transnational optic, one example will be used. It is the case of new boundaries emerging, and draws on Flavia Piperno's (2007) study of East European women originating in the Ukraine and Romania and working as domestic and care workers in households in Italy.

Social closure in the Weberian tradition connotes a group of persons drawing distinctions between "us" and "them" in order to achieve access to privileges (Weber 1980). In the

[8] E.g. relative deprivation viz. Tocqueville effect; see Jon Elster, Explaining Social Behavior: More Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences (Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[9] E.g. social closure, opportunity hoarding; see Charles Tilly, Identities, Boundaries and Social Ties (Boulder, Co: Paradigm Publishers, 2005.

broadest sense *social closure as inclusion & exclusion* speaks to the aspect of belonging. In the relational realm this implies membership, which is important, for example, for access to social formations providing access to jobs, housing, and child care. Participation in networks, cliques and groups is important both for women to get access to jobs in Italy, often to irregular work, but also to find child care, to engage in long-distance parenting, and, in case older relatives are "left behind", to care for elderly in the Ukraine or Romania. Institutionally, inclusion and exclusion is epitomized in citizenship, of which the legal aspect of belonging to polities (called nationality by legal scholars) is crucial because it facilitates opportunities for border-crossing travel and for mobility more generally. For example, Romania has been a member state of the EU since 2002 when the visa requirement for short term stays was abolished, reducing travel costs and other hurdles, while the Ukraine is still a third country. Somewhat counterintuitive, the mobility patterns and the frequency of commuting between origin and host regions, between Italy on the one hand and the Ukraine and Romania on the other hand, have been somewhat similar. Nonetheless, citizenship and thus freedom of travel make a difference. For instance, Romanian minors more often visit their mothers in Italy than their Ukrainian counterparts; probably with far reaching implications for child care and parent-child trust and interactions. Also, the employment status of Romanian women workers as EU citizens is more advantageous compared to Ukrainian women, and that thus legal security is higher.

In essence, *social closure as opportunity hoarding* is about one group occupying niches, for example, in the economic sector, such as an immigrant group in the local restaurant business of a city (Tilly 2008), and drawing benefits from this niche monopoly. In contrast to inclusion and exclusion, this mechanism does not necessarily entail direct competition with other. Relationally, a group or nurses from Romania may occupy a territorial and occupational niche such as care for the elderly in an Italian city or a neighbourhood thereof. Through strong and/or weak ties, new women may get recruited for other families, or may substitute those who move back to Eastern Europe or onwards. In this case, opportunity hoarding makes sure that members of a group (hometown) or a network benefit from referrals. One may surmise that there are reciprocal relationships, as those known from the study of ubiquitous migrant and migration networks. Institutionally, informal hiring in the Italian social security system function as a prerequisite enabling women from these two countries to engage in opportunity hoarding. The Italian social security system does not, unlike Germany, provide for formal pathways for care through instruments such as old age care insurance, and thus calls for or at least gives strong incentives for informal care arrangements. It is in this way that we can observe the evolution of new assemblages of social protection, which do not have the high level of formal differentiation of national security systems.

Exploitation is the use for unacceptable purposes of an economic re-source, in this case labour power. It presupposes clear normative standards of what is acceptable and fair in employer-employee relations. Relationally, informal work and irregular work in households, sometimes even without a legal residence permit, entails practically no legal recourse because the worker has to fear expulsion on the grounds of irregularity – even though courts may fine the employer. Institutionally, exploitation here refers to redistribution across regions, in two ways. First, one can observe a "care drain" – a specific type of "brain drain" – from Eastern Europe to Italy, that is, some of the domestic workers in Italy are skilled nurses trained in the countries of origin. As a consequence, the investment in training is lost, and shortages of labour in the care sector of the locales of origin may arise. It is certainly hard to arrive at conclusive evidence regarding the whole process – one would need to factor in incentives for young persons who may be enticed to train as nurses because of the role models (Stark 2004), and also the effects of return migration. Nonetheless, it stands to reason that there may be losses for the sending regions involved; especially for those regions which cannot replenish the loss of workers or skilled personnel through their own training institutions or from importing labour from abroad, that is brain or skill cascades. Second, not necessarily off-setting the losses just mentioned, are remittances – above all financial – by women who work as domestic helpers or care givers. While one may engage in endless calculations and debates over the amounts transferred back and forth and even enrich the analysis by non-monetary transfers such as "social remittances", the implications for social inequality are probably stark. There is growing inequality on the micro-/household level in both sending and receiving regions. Clearly, in the regions of origin not all households involved in (international) migration, only relatively "privileged" ones. Not all benefit equally from remittances; the spill-over effects are unclear. In Italy, the employment of often irregular domestic workers adds another layer of inequality into households. This observation and hunch leads to another question, namely the implications for social inequalities on other scales, for example, regions of origin/return and destination.

The mechanism of *brokerage* is central for understanding transnational dynamics. Transnational, like other social spaces, abound with "structural holes" (Burt 1992: 30–34), that is, absent links between networks, groups and organizations. In the absence of participation in networks with strong ties, brokerage may be essential to connect or match applicants to positions in the labour market, for example. Brokerage is a mechanism by which particular network actors carry out transactions between actors who are not yet connected (Simmel 1995: 297). Structurally, brokers may sustain multiple ties across various networks. Thus, brokers may derive a range of benefits from negotiating and facilitating ties between agents. Relationally, for example, pioneer migrants engaging in referrals for work and hous-

ing often are brokers. They know Italian households in need of domestic care workers, and they do entertain ties with interested women from Eastern European regions. Brokers are well positioned to bridge the flow of information on employment opportunities, but also related aspects, such as housing and child care. The bridging function of brokers is based on their social capital and structural position in relation to networks. Another example of a relational mechanism operative in this case is social scientists making suggestions for a transnational social welfare effort. Flavia Piperno and Federico Pastore have advocated "transnational welfare", which seeks to connect institutionally the regions of origin and destination, raising awareness of the interdependencies of Italian and Romanian or Ukrainian social service organizations. This relational mechanism would also entail, if successful, an institutional mechanism, namely the coupling of (parts of) social security systems and an emergent transnational social security system. The issue at stake is clear: Social welfare in the regions of origin have been placed under more strain because it has to take care of children of migrants, for example, through placement in care institutions. Indeed, the number of children from families where one or two adults have gone abroad, to whom social assistance had to be extended, did grow. Also, problems in educational institutions, for example, absenteeism and dropout, have grown. The transnational welfare assemblage would not be as complete as the national ones but would address the fact that work and life takes place in locations geographically separate, yet interconnected by per-sons often working abroad. Questions to be addressed would be, for example, how to deal with "care drain" of elderly and children, and how to improve working relations beyond irregularity (Piperno and Pastore 2006).

The institutional version of brokerage raises interesting questions about the systemic character of social protection, shifting boundaries of inclusion and exclusion and the reach of mechanisms such as solidarity and reciprocity. Usually, we think of social welfare systems as nationally bounded systems. However, here we have a transnational social space in which the boundaries have somewhat shifted: the various national social protection systems are connected through social practices of migrant women, mostly working in domestic sphere and doing care work. This leads to the question of the perception of interconnectedness (see De Swaan 1995). There are changes occurring in the welfare systems on the local level to be observed in both Romania and Italy. In Romania, schools, NGOs and local welfare services have to make up for the shortage occurring through family restructuration in the course of migration. In Italy, we may surmise, affordable domestic care relieves the government of taking steps to provide organized old age care. Is the perception of this kind of interconnectedness only in the consciousness of migrants, their significant others and social scientists, or could politicians develop an interest in transnational regulations? Is the perception of interconnectedness accompanied by feelings of solidarity? Under what conditions, and if yes, on

what scale – probably not national – could cross-border, translocal social protection policies develop? And what could be appropriate transnational and thus translocal policies? For example, would common financing and organization of care training in both origin and destination be an instrument? In sum, it stands to reason that transnational welfare or "co-welfare", as Piperno calls it, has more chances to be come into existence in the Italian-Romanian context than in the Italian-Ukrainian one, perhaps because the circles of attention and solidarity could be more encompassing between regions being part of the EU. Certainly, national citizenship would not be the main boundary securing inclusion or exclusion into social protection.

It is at this point that we can gauge the usefulness of distinguishing between institutional and relational mechanisms. There may be a tension in this case, for example between institutional brokerage and relational social closure, the aspect of inclusion and exclusion. Social closure tends to exclude non-members, for example, non-citizens or those not formally employed, from certain social protection benefits. Needless to say, irregular workers are very affected by this mechanism of inclusion and exclusion. Successful institutional brokerage – i.e. introducing the idea of transnational social protection and concomitant institutional provisions through for example, joint regulation of social protection on a local level across borders – would probably diminish some of the benefits enjoyed by included insiders, in this case Italian middle-class families employing irregular domestic and care workers but would relieve local welfare agencies, schools and family members in Romania of a great burden.

Conclusion: How many Scales?

Taking a long term view this paper suggests that a transnational approach helps to account both for the emergence of cross-border social spaces sui generis, the formation of national states, and for the changing boundaries around and within such social formations. Such an optic has the ad-vantage for not simply postulating a new level or container, replacing "nation" with "world". Instead, the focus is on the interconnectedness of elements (persons, networks, groups, organizations), and the emergent proper-ties of new assemblages.

Thus, it is a dynamic approach, which looks at transnational spaces, in which social boundaries shift, blur, become permeable, are reinforced or new ones are created. In order to analyze boundary changes, we may use social mechanismic approaches; exemplified here in looking at cross-border issues of social welfare. Social protection is a strategic research site for implications of interconnectedness and the perception thereof for life worlds, social structures and institutions. Social mechanisms such as in-/exclusion, exploitation, opportunity

hoarding, brokerage and others not discussed here[10] help us to understand and find out how boundaries work.

A transnational perspective, which takes into account the nation-state as one, albeit sometimes very important, scale of analysis, raises fascinating questions of observing and measuring phenomena such as social inequalities. Clearly, if we leave container concepts aside and look at inter-dependencies created through cross-border ties, we are confronted right away and more so than containerized analyses with the problem of identifying the levels and scales relevant for analysis. The levels or scales refer to concepts such as micro, meso, macro; or family, community, city region, state and so forth; or to distinctions between cognitive, relational, and systemic features. No matter which typology we use, the interesting question is which levels or scales to choose for observation and analysis. There may always be several, depending on the type of question asked, and the puzzle to be solved. To return to our empirical example mentioned above, it is quite relevant which level of analysis we choose to analyze social inequality. For example, we may look at changing forms of inequality on the household level in both sending and destination regions; a scale quite distinct from those of the social protection systems in both regions analyzed. These distinct scales lead to very different problems, such as relational forms of closure in households, on the one hand, and institutional ways of connecting welfare systems, on the other hand. To go even further, one may surmise that a rise in levels of inequality, measured by income, in households may go along with, in principle, declining inequalities across regions and thus within transnational social spaces at large (if only international migration would be large enough to allow for the transfer of, for example, substantial financial remittances). Such constellations raise difficult policy issues indeed, and go beyond the simplistic notions of financial remittances as development aid in win-win situations.

[10] See Göran Therborn, 'Meaning, Patterns, and Forces: An Introduction', in Göran Therborn (ed.), Inequalities of the World: New Theoretical Frameworks, Multiple Empirical Approaches (London: Verso, 2006), p. 14, for a different list.

Figure 1: Mechanisms Generating Inequalities – Some Examples

Social Formations → General Social Mechanisms ↓	**Small Groups, Net-works & Organizations** - Relational Mechanisms -	**Societal systems** - Institutional Mechanisms -
Social closure 1: Inclusion & Exclusion	Group Membership (e.g. access to networks and jobs)	Citizenship (e.g. irregular status; visa free travel)
Social closure 2: Opportunity Hoarding	Group Reciprocity (e.g. reciprocity in friendship networks, kinship systems)	Informal hiring (e.g. middle class households in Italy)
Exploitation	Informal work (e.g. household work)	Redistribution (e.g. skills and care drain: extraction from sending to receiving regions)
Brokerage	Referrals (e.g. work-related) Lobbying (e.g. policy brokerage of social scientists)	Coupling (e.g. connecting national social security systems; cf. „transnational“ citizenship

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